

Montana – Alberta: St Mary & Milk Rivers Water Management Initiative

Phase 2 Work Group
Meeting #1, Lethbridge Lodge Hotel
December 10-11, 2008, Lethbridge, Alberta

Montana	Alberta
John Tubbs – Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (co-Chair)	Robert Harrison – Alberta Environment (co-Chair)
Dustin de Yong - Office of the Lt Governor	Brent Paterson – Alberta Agriculture
Randy Reed – Milk River irrigator	Tom Gilchrist – Milk River
Dave Peterson – City of Havre	Ken Miller – Milk River
Larry Dolan – DNRC	Gerry Perry – Oldman River
Paul Azevedo – DNRC (secretariat)	Duncan Lloyd – Oldman River
	Sal Figliuzzi – Alberta Environment
	Tim Toth – AB Environment (secretariat)

Regrets: Don Wilson - Blackfeet Tribe; Representative from Ft. Belknap

Purpose of Phase 2 Work Group

To explore and evaluate options for improving both Montana's and Alberta's access to the shared water of the St. Mary and Milk Rivers, and to make joint recommendation(s) on preferred options to both governments for their consideration and approval.

Purpose of Meeting

To come together as a joint team, clarify outstanding issues with the terms of reference, and start to learn about the St Mary and Milk rivers, water use and management in Montana and Alberta, and all the relevant data to be used in this initiative.

Notes of meeting

1. Welcome – Member Introductions

All members introduced themselves to the Joint Initiative Team (JIT). The two Tribal Council members were unable to attend.

2. Terms of Reference, Communications Plan

The Terms of Reference were reviewed by the Joint Initiative Team. Each item was discussed to ensure a common understanding by the Team. There were no areas of confusion or misunderstanding. The Team will refer frequently to the terms of reference to ensure the initiative stays on track.

Communications Plan

The communications plan was reviewed by the Joint Initiative Team and they agreed that the plan should be used. They also agreed that the plan would be updated as the communication needs of the initiative change.

The Team members all supported the development of Joint Status Reports at the end of each meeting to be used to communicate about the initiative. The team members also wanted to make sure there was a common understanding of terminology used, as some terms are used differently in the two jurisdictions.

ACTION – Alberta Team to finalize their communications protocols and include that information in the communications plan.

ACTION: JIT to review the draft Communications Plan and provide any comments, additions on content.

3. Teams Involved in Joint Initiative

The Joint Initiative Team discussed the structure of the initiative. The Joint Initiative Team has equal numbers of basin representatives from both sides of the border – 6 members from Montana (the Montana Team) and 6 members from Alberta (the Alberta Team).

The Technical Support Team is made up of technical specialists from teams in both Montana and Alberta. The Technical Support Team provides the data and evaluation required by the Joint Initiative Team.

4. Outline of Learning Sessions

The first three meetings are ‘education sessions’, and will be completed in February 2009. The two technical support team leads handed out and gave an 85-slide presentation on details of the basins.

5. Learning Session #1 – Presentation by Section

Basin description – The basins’ catchment area was described.

6. Learning Session #1 – Presentation by Section - continued

Climate – the basins’ climate was described (elevation, temperature, precipitation, water deficit, etc.). Irrigation starts from early- to mid-May, depending on the season. Questions were asked to clarify such parameters as net vs. gross evaporation.

Hydrology – The natural flow and various hydrological parameters were reviewed. The timing of natural flow (e.g., differing spring run-off times) needs to be considered when evaluating how flows should be allocated from each river.

Information about Montana’s water management system can be found at: www.dnrc.mt.gov.

Information on Alberta’s river basins can be found at:

<http://www.environment.alberta.ca/apps/basins/default.aspx?Basin=11>. Specific information on the Milk River basin, Alberta, can be viewed at the Milk River Watershed Council Canada website: <http://www.milkriverwatershedcouncil.ca/> and for the Oldman River basin, Alberta, at the Oldman Watershed Council website: <http://www.oldmanbasin.org/>.

The Team recommended touring certain operations in the field, to help their understanding of current water management in the two basins. To be most efficient, tours would be arranged to occur with meetings.

From a basin-wide perspective, Milk River water gets used, often multiple times.

ACTION: Alberta secretariat will provide wall maps of the St. Mary and Milk River watersheds for the JIT.

AB-MT International / National Agreements and Compacts

The U.S.-based Compacts with Ft. Belknap, Blackfeet, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (Bowdoin NWR), and U.S. National Park Service were described. Since 1969, Alberta has had a Master Agreement on Apportionment with the provinces of Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

Water Rights and Use

The water allocation and management systems used in Montana and Alberta were described to the Team. Each jurisdiction uses some terms slightly differently. These differences were discussed to help the Team's understanding for future discussions.

No further information was identified as being required.

7. Criteria for evaluating options

The JIT should start considering what criteria could be used to evaluate the options it will recommend, once the education sessions are complete and options are being developed. Criteria could include elements of cost, volumes of water, *etc.*

Water modeling will be needed to evaluate the potential impacts of any suggested changes to flow or timing. The Technical Support Team will need direction about the kinds of analyses the Joint Initiative Team will need.

8. Meeting Review, Next Meeting, Actions

The JIT agreed that this was a very valuable learning session and thanked Sal and Larry. The JIT agreed to advance the meeting start time by one hour to start at 2:00 PM on the first day.

Between meeting communications – the JIT should contact any technical team member for information, and share any learning that they do on their own. Requests for additional research from the Technical Support Team should be made through the jurisdictional secretariats.

A joint status report will be completed after the meeting and circulated to members.

Next meeting dates were set as follows: Jan. 12-13, Great Falls – education II; Feb. 18-19, Lethbridge – education III; March 30-31, Great Falls – options development I

At the January meeting, the JIT will consider what field learning tour is most appropriate.

ACTION: For next meeting, the JIT requested an overview of Alberta's infrastructure system (the St. Mary's project).

The meeting adjourned at 3:00 PM.

Action Items

- Alberta Team to finalize their communications protocols and include that information in the communications plan.
- JIT to review the draft Communications Plan and provide any comments, additions on content.
- Alberta secretariat will provide wall maps of the St. Mary and Milk River watersheds for the JIT.
- For next meeting, the JIT requested an overview of Alberta's infrastructure system (the St. Mary's project).